



MISSOURI SENATE

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Protecting Our Children

Legislation will ensure proper education, health and safety

JEFFERSON CITY – As the Senate is moving forward on legislation to rewrite Missouri’s school funding system, there is no better time to take a look at all we are doing to serve the children of Missouri.

Senate Bill 287, which was given initial approval by the Senate this week, will institute a school funding formula that will distribute education funds more equitably. The bill modifies the current system, which is driven by tax rates, to one that works according to the individual needs of state school districts. Our new “foundation formula” accounts for the differing property values and costs of living in Missouri school districts and ensures that schools receive enough funding to educate our children.

Lawmakers and administrators throughout Missouri’s 524 school districts agree that a new system needs to be developed. Our current funding program allots funds according to property values and taxes in each district. Because of the difference in property values between districts, wealthier districts have more to spend than do poorer ones. Per-pupil funding varies from \$5,000 to \$13,000 in Missouri districts.

This legislation determines a minimum per-student dollar amount needed to provide an adequate education. It requires each district to pay at least \$6,117 per student, a figure devised by studying Missouri’s top-performing districts. To address the differing costs of education, an index will be applied and the \$6,117 figure will be adjusted for each district. As a result, the varying buying powers of Missouri districts will be accounted for and our system will be fair and legally defensible.

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While we work to ensure the proper education of our children, my colleagues and I in the Senate also want to help our schools provide students with an active, healthy environment. Senate Concurrent Resolution 4, which I am co-sponsoring, expresses our support for school policies that will increase physical education requirements in public schools and require more nutritious choices in school meals and snacks.

As juvenile diabetes and obesity reach epidemic rates, we need to take preventive measures to reverse course. Our children are leading less active lifestyles. They are increasingly turning to television screens instead of ball fields for entertainment. By emphasizing physical activity and nutritional eating habits at school, our children can take that behavior home and develop healthier lifestyles.

While my colleagues and I look to protect our children from their own habits, we also want to shelter them from other dangers. Senate Bill 10, which I am co-sponsoring, will reduce Missouri's methamphetamine scourge. This bill requires over-the-counter cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine to be distributed by pharmacists or licensed technicians. The legislation applies to tablets, not syrup or gel caps. By making it more difficult for criminals to purchase the chemicals used to make meth, we can help get these drugs, which destroy families and lives, off the streets. In doing so, we can protect our children from an affliction that plagues our communities.

As we address the education, health and well being of our children, we must not forget the moral environment in which they are raised. We have to lead by example if we are to place the burden of the future on the shoulders of our sons and daughters. That is why legislation I am co-sponsoring will make it easier to donate money to pregnancy support centers. Senate Bill 251 will provide tax credit for contributions to facilities that support women, provide counseling and encourage birth over abortion. By supporting these facilities and demonstrating a willingness to foster a culture of life, we can teach our children the importance of charity, family and humanity.

Through all of these measures, we can build a better Missouri. And it all starts with our children.

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Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.